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FORTUNES

WASHED

AWAY

A Series of
Dramatizations
of Better
Land Use

No. 148 February 22, 1941 1:15 p.m.

"THE BELL WITCH"

W·L·W CINCINNATI

United States Department of Agriculture
Soil Conservation Service
Dayton · Ohio

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WILLIAM CHAMBERLAIN

Professor of Physics, University of Chicago

Chicago, Illinois

1910

SOUND: Whistling wind...

VOICE

Black blizzards across the plains.

SOUND OFF MIKE: Woman coughing...

SECOND VOICE

Biting wind!

DEEP VOICE

Choking dust.

SOUND: Up wind, set fire...

VOICE

Havoc...

SECOND VOICE

Destruction...

DEEP VOICE

Waste...

SOUND: Up wind, kill fire, set flood...

VOICE

Floods rushing down the great valleys.

VOICES IN UNISON

Floods, drowning, killing, wasting...

SOUND: Up wind...

DEEP VOICE

The wealth of America washing and blowing away -- soil erosion!

SOUND: Clap of thunder...

ANNOUNCER

The Bell Witch: the 148th consecutive episode of Fortunes Washed
Away!

ORGAN THEME: DEEP RIVER

ANNOUNCER

Near the northern boundary of Tennessee, little more than a stone's throw from the Kentucky line, is a cave in a bluff 300 feet high and almost perpendicular -- the Bell Witch Cave. And whenever a man named Bell is introduced around Middle Tennessee, whether he be from California or Maine, Canada or Mexico, he is sure to be asked if he is one of the Bells of the "Bell Witch" family. Here is a legend that has endured a hundred years, and pleasant old darkies still shake their heads and rub their rabbits' feet when the name of the Bell Witch is mentioned. They won't admit it, but they swear among themselves that there really was, and still is, the Bell Witch.

ORGAN: WITCH MUSIC.

ANNOUNDER

At the close of the War of the Revolution, when weary men of all armies marched back to their homes to begin life anew, and others moved westward, John Bell moved from Virginia to Robertson County, Tennessee. He was a proud man as he drove up to his newly-purchased farm with his wife. The old surrey pulled to a halt as....

SOUND: Horses gradually stopping...

JOHN

There, Lucy....there is our new home. One thousand acres of the best land in all this wilderness.

LUCY

It does look like a truly immense place. But...is that the house?

JOHN

At present, yes. But don't worry. We'll build one a hundred times larger! Why, with all this timber, and the slaves, and my own...

LUCY

Yes, your own energy. I know you, John Bell. In a dozen year's you'll have a plantation made out of this....this desolation. I do believe you will!

JOHN

I know I will! Ah, Lucy, you were raised in the city. You don't know the thrill of farming...the joy of seeing things grow, of seeing the earth turned over and the rich smell of the loam... but look! Here comes Jubilee, I do declare!

LUCY

Is that the slave you mentioned?

JOHN

Yes, a good slave he is, too. I bought him with the farm.

JUBILEE (fading in)

.....it's right good to see you, Massa John. I sure enough say it's so.

JOHN

This is Missus Bell, Jubilee.

JUBILEE

Thanky, sir...and I sure enough hope you will like it here, ma'am. Me and my old woman Faith-an-hope will do all we can for you.

LUCY

Faith-an-Hope? Is that your wife's name?

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JUBILEE

Yas'm. Her paw had his mind set on three girls and a boy, and he aimed to name 'em Faith, Hope, Charity, and Mephistopheles. But the second young-un was a boy, so her paw just tacked Hope onto Faith, or something like that. I never could figure it out.

JOHN (Laughing)

And neither can I.

LUCY

Well, that's none of our worry. Shall we go on to the house?

JOHN

I believe we had. You lead the horses, Jubilee.

JUBILEE

Afore you go, I think there's something you ought to watch out about.

JOHN

And what's that?

JUBILEE (whispering)

The spirit.

LUCY

The spirit?

JOHN

What do you mean?

JUBILEE

A spirit. Kate, the Witch. A ha'nt.

JOHN

Oh, nonsense!

1. The first part of the report is a general introduction to the subject.

2. The second part is a detailed description of the methods used in the study.

3. The third part is a discussion of the results of the study.

4. The fourth part is a conclusion and a list of references.

5. The fifth part is a list of figures and tables.

6. The sixth part is a list of appendices.

7. The seventh part is a list of footnotes.

8. The eighth part is a list of references.

9. The ninth part is a list of figures and tables.

10. The tenth part is a list of appendices.

11. The eleventh part is a list of footnotes.

12. The twelfth part is a list of references.

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17. The seventeenth part is a list of figures and tables.

18. The eighteenth part is a list of appendices.

19. The nineteenth part is a list of footnotes.

20. The twentieth part is a list of references.

21. The twenty-first part is a list of figures and tables.

22. The twenty-second part is a list of appendices.

23. The twenty-third part is a list of footnotes.

24. The twenty-fourth part is a list of references.

JUBILEE

Massa John, I speak for a fact. We can always tell by de witch when the weather will change. Hit's mighty fine about de weather, but nuthin else. (WHISPERING) Do you reckon she he'rd me?

ORGAN: Thin, eery chord behind....

WITCH (filter mike)

Double, double, toil and trouble, cauldron burn and water bubble. And I will watch you, John Bell...with a thousand eyes....just as I've watched over this land for a thousand centuries.

JUBILEE (FRIGHTENED)

Did you hear that?

JOHN

Gad! I heard nothing. But...yet, I felt a strange sensation, as though some unseen...oh! Come on, Jubilee! Let's get on to the house!

SOUND: Horses start off...

LUCY

Yes, let's do.

(PAUSE)

JOHN (fading in)

...I do hope you don't mind walking over the farm, Lucy, but I wanted....

LUCY

Mind? I love it! So many trees, and colorful leaves....all colors.

March 1

Dear Mr. [Name], I have your letter of the 28th and am
glad to hear that you are well. I am also well and hope
this finds you the same. I have not much news to write
at present. The weather is very cold here now. I have
just received a letter from [Name] and he is well.
I hope to hear from you soon. I am, dear sir,
very respectfully,
Yours truly,
[Signature]

I have not much news to write at present. The weather is
very cold here now. I have just received a letter from
[Name] and he is well. I hope to hear from you soon.
I am, dear sir, very respectfully,
Yours truly,
[Signature]

JOHN

Yes. We'll get rid of them. Now, over there I want to clear that hill, and put in tobacco. We can use the lumber for the tobacco and hay barns, and stables for the horses and mules. Now, on that bluff there...

LUCY (FRIGHTENED)

John!

JOHN

Yes, what...

LUCY

Over there on that fence!

JOHN

Over...why...

LUCY

I must be dreaming!

JOHN

The head of a dog, and the body of a turkey! Well, we'll soon find out who's dreaming. Give me that gun.

SOUND: Rifle shot...

LUCY

It's gone! Disappeared into thin air!

ORGAN: Thin, eery chord behind...

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WITCH

Gone? Oh, no...for I shall ever be here, a spirit come back to earth. I watch this land, John Bell. I will always watch this land, John Bell. Come over to my cave, John Bell, where I can see high over this land...where I can see high over the rivers that run crystal clear. If they ever run red, John Bell, you and men like you will pay the penalty. For that red will not be the blood of you and men like you...it will be the blood of the nation, its lifeblood, its soil.

JOHN

I think we'd better go back to the house, Lucy.

(PAUSE)

SOUND: Crowd noises dying out....

LUCY

Well! I'm glad that's over. Seems like that's all you men do... log rolling, barn raising, hog killing...and everytime you do we women have to get together at the same time.

JOHN

Do you mind it so much, Lucy?

LUCY

Of course not! In fact, my salt rising bread was better than any of the other women's. And as for that Missus Fairfax, I can beat her pies and cakes any day. And I do so like the quilting parties!

JOHN

Personally, if we hadn't stuffed so much, I'd be ready for some more of that maple syrup. Ah...maple syrup from our own trees. This is the life.

LUCY

John, I want to talk to you a moment.

JOHN

Well, what are you doing?

LUCY

This is serious. We missed church last Sunday because of the bad roads, and one of the women told me that the preacher preached but couldn't be heard -- the witch had his throat.

JOHN

Oh, why believe those things!

LUCY

And the children...they're talking about it. Betsy complained of having her hair pulled, and Joel said the covers were pulled off him at night.

JOHN

Why, I....why...Lucy, I didn't tell you, but the other night my horse stopped and no matter how hard I whipped her, she wouldn't budge. I would have sworn it was the "spirit".

ORGAN: Thin, eery chord behind...

WITCH

Spirit? Possibly. You have improved this farm wonderfully, John Bell. You have built new houses, new barns, new cabins for the slaves. Your wife cooks roast wild turkey, fish, and corn for the neighbors and for your family. It is up to you, John Bell, to improve the land.

(PAUSE)

SOUND: Banjo plunking in background...

LUCY

A continental for your thoughts.

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2. The second part is a detailed description of the methods used.

3. The third part is a discussion of the results obtained.

4. The fourth part is a conclusion and summary of the work.

5. The fifth part is a list of references.

6. The sixth part is a list of figures.

7. The seventh part is a list of tables.

8. The eighth part is a list of appendices.

9. The ninth part is a list of footnotes.

10. The tenth part is a list of errata.

11. The eleventh part is a list of acknowledgments.

12. The twelfth part is a list of dedications.

13. The thirteenth part is a list of prefaces.

14. The fourteenth part is a list of contents.

15. The fifteenth part is a list of indexes.

16. The sixteenth part is a list of glossaries.

17. The seventeenth part is a list of bibliographies.

18. The eighteenth part is a list of references.

19. The nineteenth part is a list of footnotes.

20. The twentieth part is a list of errata.

JOHN

Eh? Oh, they're not worth a continental.

LUCY

They are to me.

JOHN

Why, my dear...I was just thinking what a difference 40 years have made in the farm.

LUCY

What a dreary place it was in those days. And now...you've accumulated money, and slaves, and I must say...you're most generous in making loans to your neighbors.

JOHN

I don't believe in taking mortgages. I know those people, and they know me. I take their word, and they take mine.

SOUND: Loud clattering in background...

JUBILEE (off mike)

No! No! I won't never do it no more! Please, Miss Kate!
Please Spirit!

JOHN

What in thunder?

LUCY

It's Jubilee.

JOHN

Jubilee! What's the matter in there?

SOUND: Man rushing thru door, panting...

JUBILEE (fading in)

Oh, Massa John, the most turrible thing just happened.

JOHN

What is it? Speak up!

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JUBILEE

Massa John, I was starting to build that fire, and I reckon I was late. And....

LUCY

You were late. It's cold in the house.

JUBILEE

Yas'm. And just as I started to build it, the pieces of kindling just come up and beat me all over. They just jerked me across the chair and whaled the daylights out of me. Oh, Spirit, I never will be late no more.

LUCY

Oh, nonsense, Jubilee!

JOHN

Nonsense?

ORGAN: Thin, eery chord behind....

WITCH

Nonsense? Possibly. But I have watched over your farm, John Bell, and you have cut down the trees. You have taken care of the land, though, for a land can be handled without being man-handled. I have given you much trouble, John Bell. I go now. I will return in one hundred years to look at this same land -- the same land you looked upon with pride when you drove up here a long, long time ago. I will return, in one hundred years, to see how your descendants have handled that same land. Will it have been handled correctly, John Bell...or manhandled? In one hundred years.

ORGAN: UP AND OUT.

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ANNOUNCER

Legend or no, the story of the Bell Witch is well remembered and well recognized in Robertson County, Tennessee. And now, once again we turn to the Soil Conservation Service of the United States Department of Agriculture, and here is Ewing Jones.

JONES

Thanks again, John Cornell, for your usual cherry greeting. It's especially cheery after that eery Bell Witch. And this is something that should cheer the hearts of every farmer...

ANNOUNCER

I should say it would, Ewing...or rather, they would...

JONES

They is the word, John, because here is a handful of leaflets on how to plant trees, where to plant them and so on...

ANNOUNCER

That's right. Spring planting is coming on, and foresters and farmers are agreed that spring is the time to plant trees. May I see them...

JONES

Here's the fistful.

ANNOUNCER

Thanks. Now, friends, in looking over this fistful of leaflets that Ewing has just given me, I see plenty of things. Here is a suggestion on where to plant trees, and what to expect of those trees. And over here is a tip on what kinds of trees are best suited for different parts of the country, and on this page right here is a list of rules for how to plant trees so that they will live, and this next page tells where to get those trees. Shall I go farther, Ewing?

114

The first of these is the fact that the

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The second of these is the fact that the

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The third of these is the fact that the

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The fourth of these is the fact that the

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The fifth of these is the fact that the

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The sixth of these is the fact that the

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The seventh of these is the fact that the

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The eighth of these is the fact that the

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The ninth of these is the fact that the

JONES

You forgot to tell them where to get those leaflets. I'm sure you won't give up your own copies.

ANNOUNCER

I sure won't. But friends, if you want copies of these leaflets on tree planting, write to Soil Conservation, Dayton, Ohio. That's right, isn't it?

JONES

Perfect, John. A penny postcard is all that is needed, to write to Soil Conservation, Dayton, Ohio, and just say....tree planting. We'll know what to do, and you'll know what to do when you get those leaflets on tree planting. Just write to Soil Conservation, Dayton, Ohio. But John...you haven't asked me yet about what happened to the Bell Witch.

CORNELL

So I haven't. Pardon, please, but I was interested in these tree planting leaflets. What did become of the Bell Witch?

JONES

Well, so the story goes, she did return after a hundred years.... and that was last year. What do you think she found about that farm?

CORNELL

A fortune washed away?

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JONES

On the contrary. Judge John Bell Turner inherited that land, and now it's owned by his widow, and operated by one Jerry Porter. Jerry Porter, I might say, was superintendent of a CCC camp at Clarksville, Tennessee, for several years, and he did all in his power to preach soil conservation to the farmers around there. Now he's gone to this farm to put into practice what he had been preaching. Every bit of cultivated land is tilled on the contour, instead of up-and-down hill. I never will forgive Jerry for the time he gave me a home-rolled cigar. Of course he warned that it would be strong. I don't know about it all...but I know the first quarter-inch was strong. So, John, if the Bell Witch ever did or ever does come back, she won't need to worry about the Bell farm -- Jerry Porter is taking care of the soil.

CORNELL

Taking care of the soil of Robertson County, Tennessee. Isn't that where the Soil Conservation Service has a demonstration project? Seems like I saw that on a map somewhere.

JONES

Yes, and now it has a farm forestry project. Kenneth Holmes is the project forester there, and he reports that plenty of farmers are finding that woods can be a cash crop the same as a clean-tilled crop. They are planning their farms to control erosion, and those farm plans include proper protection and restoration of the woods -- the same kinds of trees that John Bell cut down a long, long time ago. Robertson County, Tennessee, is a conservation county.

JONES (on cue)

Remember, if you want the leaflets on how to plant trees, and when, and what, and why, just write to Soil Conservation, Dayton, Ohio. This is Ewing Jones speaking for the Soil Conservation Service of the United States Department of Agriculture...and next week at this same time we'll bring you the story of the Popcorn King -- another chapter of Fortunes Washed Away.

ORGAN: UP AND OUT.

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1911

The first of the year was a very dry one, and the
crops were much injured. The weather was very hot
and the ground was very dry. The crops were much
injured and the yield was very small. The weather
was very hot and the ground was very dry. The crops
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